



December 2019

# The Bison Rancher

Official Newsletter of the Rocky Mountain Bison Association

## What's Happening

### January 22-25, 2020

NBA's Winter Conference and  
Gold Trophy Show & Sale  
Denver, Colorado

### March 6/7/8, 2020\*

RMBA Spring Conference

### June 21-23, 2020\*

NBA Summer Conference  
(co-hosted by RMBA)  
Cheyenne, Wyoming

*\*Dates are tentative*

## Welcome to *The Bison Rancher*

Welcome to the newly renamed newsletter of the newly renamed Rocky Mountain Bison Association (RMBA). We apologize for the unannounced delay in newsletters as we have been working on lots of exciting updates. Check out what has changed in 2019:

- **Name:** Rocky Mountain Bison Association
- **Website:** [BisonRanchers.com](http://BisonRanchers.com)
- **RMBA Logo:** (see top left corner)
- **Membership Renewal Period:** Memberships (except lifetime memberships) expire at the end of each calendar year. Starting this year, members can renew anytime between October 1, 2019 - December 31, 2019.
- **New RMBA Gear:** Pens, stickers, hats & more with the new RMBA logo will be available at future events for purchase.

Please read on to get the latest. We look forward to seeing you all again very soon!

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### Rocky Mountain Bison Association

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## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

# Ending 2019 on a Strong Note

*By John Graves, RMBA President*

As we come to the end of 2019, it is always a good time to look back on the year and reflect on what we've accomplished.

### Spring Conference

Two words come to mind when I think back to the spring conference we had this year: thankful and inspiring. I am very thankful for our record attendance with people coming from not only the Rocky Mountain region, but from across the country. This large turnout led to great discussion and the sharing of a wealth of bison knowledge. We also had some extraordinary items donated to our benefit auction and generous bids throughout the event. A special

thank you to Jud Seaman of Quality Auction Services for donating his time and experience conducting our benefit auction.

Our conference was also inspiring. It was inspiring to the board to have such a large turnout and such great interactions with new members, future members, and some founding members we have not seen for a few years. It reminds us of how important our association is, and motivates us to continue to serve our members. I also hope that the presentations inspired all of the attendees to implement something they learned to further their operation and have a more successful business.

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## Board of Directors

### **PRESIDENT**

**John Graves**

*CU Ralphie Mascot Program*

303-887-9677

### **VICE PRESIDENT**

**Debbie Thieman**

*Prairie Ridge Buffalo*

719-775-8742

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**Patty Smith**

*Lay Valley Bison Ranch*

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### **SECRETARY**

**Jen Graves**

720-891-9360

### **DIRECTOR**

**Ace Ward**

*Brush Meat Processors*

970-488-0003

### **DIRECTOR**

**Nicole Jeffries**

*Nilisber Bison Ranch*

303-995-2783

### **DIRECTOR**

**Tom Stelmach**

*Peak to Peak Ranch*

303-774-0562

### **DIRECTOR**

**Kyle Stodola**

*Sun Rise Ranch*

720-364-0835

Elections are held annually at the Spring General Membership Meeting. Meeting minutes & financials are available from the Board Secretary.

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## **Name Change**

We did vote to change our name to the Rocky Mountain Bison Association at our Membership Meeting. Following RMBA's name change, at least two other associations also voted on replacing "buffalo" with "bison" in their name. One association approved the change, while the other did not. Ultimately, I think the strongest argument for the association to change terms was to ensure we use scientific terminology as a breed association dedicated to one species. That being said, the term buffalo has a long-standing historic significance across the country, especially in the west, and we recognize and understand those who prefer to use this term.

## **Fall Tour**

Our fall tour was also one for our record books: record attendance, a number of new people attending, and a number of people joining our association. A big thank you to Bob and Laurie Dineen, Ace Ward, and the staff at Rocky Mountain Natural Meats for hosting us and providing an educational tour of Brush Meat Processors.

Rick and Lindsay Forepaugh did an outstanding job hosting our group at their Kimball, Nebraska Monkey Ranch. It was a perfect setting to learn more about their operation and have an enjoyable evening with fellow bison enthusiasts.

## **Thoughts on Price Forecasts**

Of course, prices of carcasses and live animals have been on a lot of our minds. It should be on everyone's mind during both high and low years. I was not involved in the



industry during the early 2000's when there was the big crash of the bison market, but I have to wonder if people are reading too much into the latest price trends and thinking another crash is coming. I know that is a strong statement, but hear me out.

Current lower prices are slightly concerning. I see sale results and read about small producers having herd dispersals and I will admit, it is a little worrisome. But we need to consider all potential reasons why that is happening.

Everyone has their theories and there is a lot of speculation as to when this trend might end. Here is what we know for sure: people eating bison meat thoroughly enjoy bison meat and will continue to do so, and more people are discovering bison meat and considering whether it is right for them.

As NBA Executive Director Dave Carter recently pointed out, we are seeing much higher carcass utilization than we have in the past. Here in Colorado, many restaurants have always served a bison burger; however, the past couple of years, additional bison products have started popping up on menus. This trend is starting to take hold across

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the U.S. as well, and when consumers have a meal they like at a restaurant, they will then try to make it at home.

With consumers now seeking out additional cuts of bison, grocery stores are responding to the demand by stocking it. Additionally, organizers of farmer's markets realize having a local bison rancher at their market is a good thing for their event, and a great thing for that rancher. The increase of demand for ALL bison cuts helps to support the carcass price, and it reduces excess meat going to freezer storage resulting in some loss of value. This demand is directly linked to pricing.

I think we are closing in on the turning point in our industry, a turning point for the better. Thanks to efforts at RMBA, our members, and our friends at the NBA we are getting the word out about bison. Our current consumers seek it out for numerous reasons: it's local, it's healthier than other red meats, it's flavorful, ranching practices are sustainable and have a positive impact on the environment, etc.

A big factor for both current and future consumers is the story of bison. **We can help ourselves out by continuing to tell the bison story, highlighting the benefits of bison meat.** Our story is a strong and powerful one. Telling it will allow our industry to continue to thrive for generations.

### **Look Outside Your Circle**

We all run around in the same circles, the same sphere of influence. Look no further than social media; as friends and bison enthusiasts, we all read, share and promote the same stories and pictures about bison. But we need to take a step outside of the circle to see how other people view bison or bring bison into their view.

I'm encouraged, seeing news outlets new to the industry doing stories about how bison are raised and their positive effects on the land. Agriculture publications are covering bison ranching more. Health magazines run articles with recipes for bison meat and highlight the health benefits. Celebrities and world-class athletes have discovered bison

meat and are promoting it.

To see outside your circle, go to a large grocery store and watch people that are shopping for meat. They weigh options, read labels and ask questions. Today's consumers educate themselves before making a decision. There are outliers to this, but research is clear: consumers are more interested in knowing exactly what they are buying, and that they are feeding their families a good product. Our job is to show that what they are looking for is exactly what we provide.

I know my initial statement of people reading too much into our current industry pricing was a bit strong, but as an industry, we are strong. Prices will bounce back soon. Things will turn about and head in the right direction.

I hope everyone's round up was successful and safe this year with high calf crops and high breed ups. We will see you all in Denver this January. As always, feel free to call me anytime if there is something you want to talk about, or swing by the stock yards and we can chat then too.

## **2017 USDA Census Statistics**

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced the results of their 2017 census in April of this year. Census data provides valuable insights into demographics, economics, land and activities on U.S. farms and ranches. Here are some key bison numbers.

### **Total number of bison in the United States (2017):**

183,780 bison on 1,775 farms (compared to 162,110 bison on 2,564 farms in 2012).

### **Totals by state in our region (2017):**

- Colorado: 11,119 on 82 farms (6<sup>th</sup> overall for most bison)
- Wyoming: 9,755 on 47 farms (7<sup>th</sup> overall for most bison)
- New Mexico: 4,942 on 23 farms (8<sup>th</sup> overall for most bison)





## MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

# Mosquito Park Enterprises

By Rod Sather, Mosquito Park

In the late 60s and early 70s, while attending a fine Lutheran school as the only Presbyterian on full scholarship, I did some reading on the American buffalo and the animals seemed to fit with my "wild side."

Fast forward to the summer of '72. I don't remember if it was the conference or the buffalo that came first, but I do know that the fences and working system came much later. About that year the National Buffalo Association (NBA) held their summer conference in Pierre, South Dakota. It was at the King's Inn, and the host ranch was the Triple U. I arrived just in time for the evening "social" which was held down in the basement. There stood smiling Dave and May Raynolds, from Lander, Wyoming, next to a steamship round. I said to myself, "A social, with red meat and smiley faces? I'm going to get along just fine with these boys!" It was one heck of a bunch!

At the Triple U Ranch, north of

Fort Pierre, we enjoyed a buffalo burger lunch and a wonderful ranch tour. I marveled at the wide-open spaces, picked up buffalo chips on the prairie grasslands and watched hundreds of buffalo. We later enjoyed a buffalo BBQ, evening social and a fun auction. I believe that Bob Bradeen conducted the auction, as his son, young Ronnie, was with his babysitter.

### Getting the Herd Started

In the fall, three guys from southwest Minnesota, ventured out in a borrowed van to Custer State Park Buffalo Auction. One of the gentlemen purchased two, two-year old bulls for slaughter. I, not to be outdone, purchased at least six calves. Anyway, the trailer was full.

We took one of my sister's horse pens, scooped the snow away from the fences on the inside and piled it in the middle, then scooped it away from the outside

of the fences. We cut the buffalo loose in their new winter home. You'd have thought they were mountain goats the way they climbed the snow piles. Life was good and the herd settled in. Three years later the first calf was born on Fathers' Day. We watched the birth from a safe distance, with the telescope. A second cow delivered her calf soon after. The herd was growing and I was in the buffalo business.

As southwest Minnesota winters go, it snowed, the wind blew, the fence disappeared and the buffalo wandered, came home, and wandered, came home and wandered. There were reports at the local saloon and eatery that buffalo were roaming wild in this country. While in pursuit of the roaming herd, I was stopped by a State Trooper. When I said, "You won't believe this, but my buffalo are out." His reply was, "You must be Rod Sather!"

### Moving & Growing the Herd

In 1993, I found myself bird watching in Lyman County, South Dakota with my friend Dean Schumacher. I couldn't resist living in an area so rich in wildlife so I ended up moving to Lyman County to a place so muddy it was christened "The Muddy Boot."

Soon to follow was the Wells Ranch, located 12 miles north of

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the Muddy Boot. More buffalo started to appear on the landscape. Fellow Minnesotans, Chad and Suzie Kremer arrived in Lyman County. All of a sudden fences were built, corrals were going up and a handling facility was in operation. Our buffalo, for the most part, chose to stay at home. The buffalo cows were "range-cake trained," which is an absolute must in keeping them happy and remembering where home is.

The herd grew and grew. The neighbor's Little Cedar Ranch was for sale, so the herd grew more. We were excited and optimistic about the buffalo industry.

### Changing it Up

In 2010, it was time to move on from ranching. We sold the ranch and the buffalo, but remained involved in the industry, buying and selling a few buffalo.

Lynnette and I remain involved. I serve on the Board of the National Buffalo Foundation, and am a Life Member of the National Buffalo Museum. We are life members of the NBA. We hold memberships in the Canadian Bison Association, as well as state and regional associations, such as the Dakota Territories Buffalo Association (DTBA), Minnesota Bison Association (MnBA), RMBA, North Dakota Buffalo Association (NDBA) and Western Bison Association (WBA). I've also enjoyed attending all but one of the International Bison Conferences (IBCs).

Following the IBC in Quebec City, Lynnette lured me to the forests of Saskatchewan, a favorite hunting location of mine.

The Lyman County Herald would later post the following: "Big news! Big news! Confirmed bachelor and perpetual single guy, Rod Sather, and longtime girlfriend, Lynnette Laird, were married August 2, 2012 at a full moon party and destination wedding in Big River, Saskatchewan, Canada. They honeymooned in Rocky Mountain House, Alberta. The handsome groom was dressed in his best buffalo hide clothing, with buffalo jewelry. The beautiful bride was dressed in the finest silk France has to offer, accented with her silver buffalo jewelry. Congratulations to the new couple."

### Starting a New Herd

After attending the 2013 NBA Summer Conference in Deadwood, we hopped in John Cammack's pickup for a ranch tour. His herd came to greet us over the hillsides like a scene out of *Dances With Wolves*. It was a wonder to behold, and I turned to my bride and said, "We need some buffalo!" Luckily we hadn't sold all the land, so back to ranching we went. At the DTBA "Girlz Gone Wild" and the "Young Guns" sales we were busy bidding and filling up the trailer. Today we are up to around one



hundred cows in two herds.

At the 2018 DTBA Winter Conference I was honored with their Pioneer Award. I am so very proud to be part of the bison world, with so many fine hardworking and fun loving folks that I've met and mingled with over the years.

### Visit The Bison Rehab

Over the years some of the old buffalo people have said, "We need a buffalo 'rehab' place; A place to gather with other buffalo folks". We have put that together near Keystone, South Dakota, just 10 minutes from Custer State Park. The Bison Rehab and Huckleberry Social Club has been opened at the Hayward Valley House Vacation Rental. Booking can be done at [BlackHillsRetreats.com](http://BlackHillsRetreats.com).

We'd love to have you visit!

# 2019 RMBA Conferences See Record Attendance

By Jen Graves, Board Secretary

Building on a great 2018, 2019 surpassed expectations with both our Spring Conference and Fall Ranch Tour breaking record attendance.

## 2019 Spring Conference

Our annual spring conference was held March 2 & 3 at the Marriot Hotel in Westminster. Although a snowy weekend, it gathered approximately 90 bison enthusiasts and garnered nine new members by the end.

As always, our spring conference included a General Membership Meeting and annual elections. President John Graves provided

updates on RMBA's new website, our expanded role with Junior Judging at the Gold Trophy Show and Sale (GTSS), and the priorities for the board in the coming year. Dave Carter provided an update from the National Bison Association (NBA). Notably, the membership discussed and voted to start using the term "bison" in our association name.

## Board Elections

Elections were held at the end of the meeting. Officer positions (i.e., President, Vice President, Secretary and Treasurer) are one-year terms and all current officers were re-elected to their position. Two of the four Director-at-Large positions were up for reelection and both of the current board members, Nicole Jeffries and Ace Ward, were re-elected.

Following the general meeting, attendees heard 10 presentations over two days on topics such as:

- handling system design and materials
- minerals, feed and nutrition
- special program certifications (Animal Welfare, Organic, Non-GMO, etc.)
- product labeling regulations
- transportation rules, regulations and exemptions
- holistic management, including using a grazing calendar/plan
- vaccination programs and minor procedures without a vet

Saturday evening included a bison filet dinner, a round of Bison Bingo and the annual benefit auction. Proceeds from the benefit

auction helps keep the price of membership down and enables us to provide a \$1,200 scholarship to the second place winner in the Junior Judging competition at the GTSS. "It was one of the most lively and entertaining benefit auctions of our history and we appreciate all those who donated and purchased items," said John Graves.

Of course, we could not do it without our sponsors: Adams Natural Meats, Frontiere Meats, Patty Smith, Rod Sather, Mosquito Park Enterprises, and the National Buffalo Foundation. Thank you sponsors!

## 2019 Fall Ranch Tour

Our fall tour was held on September 15 and included a morning tour of Brush Meat Processors (BMP) in Brush, Colorado, followed by a tour of Monkey Ranch near Kimball, Nebraska. Over 50 RMBA members and 7 non-members attended the tour, with all but one non-member joining the association during or shortly after the tour! (*Welcome new members listed on page 8!*)

Welcoming RMBA to BMP was Bob & Laurie Dineen, Ace Ward and a few staff willing to come in on a Sunday to show attendees their beautiful facility. Rocky Mountain Natural Meats (RMNM) owns BMP. Their label, Great Range Bison, sells bison cuts from the premier bison ranches in North America. For the past 30 years, they have worked closely with their ranchers/producers to ensure the bison are raised on pasture, finished on grasses and

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Jud Seaman and Greg Nott demonstrate the size of pants up for auction during the Spring Conference fun auction.





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grains, and are free from the use of antibiotics or growth hormones. BMP opened in 2013 to enable RMNM to guarantee quality by overseeing the product from the time it leaves the rancher until it goes to the consumer.

After being treated to coffee and donuts courtesy of BMP, members heard about the plant from Bob, watched a video of the facility in action and then took a tour.

### Touring Monkey Ranch

The group then caravanned 100 miles to Rocky Hollow Buffalo Company's Monkey Ranch. The ranch, owned by Rick and Lindsay Forepaugh, is 11 miles north of Kimball, Nebraska. Rick's folks, RMBA members Vance Forepaugh and Jill Crotty, own Medicine Wheel Ranch in Elbert, Colorado. Medicine Wheel Ranch has had superior performance at the NBA's GTSS. The bison are owned 50/50 between the two families and are raised at the Monkey Ranch. The two families then move the selected GTSS entries to the Medicine Wheel Ranch. Their 100% grass-fed, grass-finished buffalo are raised holistically and naturally, never subjected to antibiotics or hormones. As they like to say, they raise the animals "the way nature intended." Their operation includes calf sales, meat sales to local restaurants, meat sales to private parties, and buffalo herd tours.

The Forepaughs had generously setup tents & chairs for a beautiful background barbecue. Following lunch, attendees heard about two new mobile phone apps created by the NBA: the Bison Producer's

app and Buy Some Bison app. Then the group split in two, each visiting the bison and touring the handling facilities.

Evening activities included personal introductions by attendees, poetry and a gourmet taco dinner. The tour would not be possible without the generosity and a lot of hard work by the Forepaughs. Thank you Rick and Lindsay!

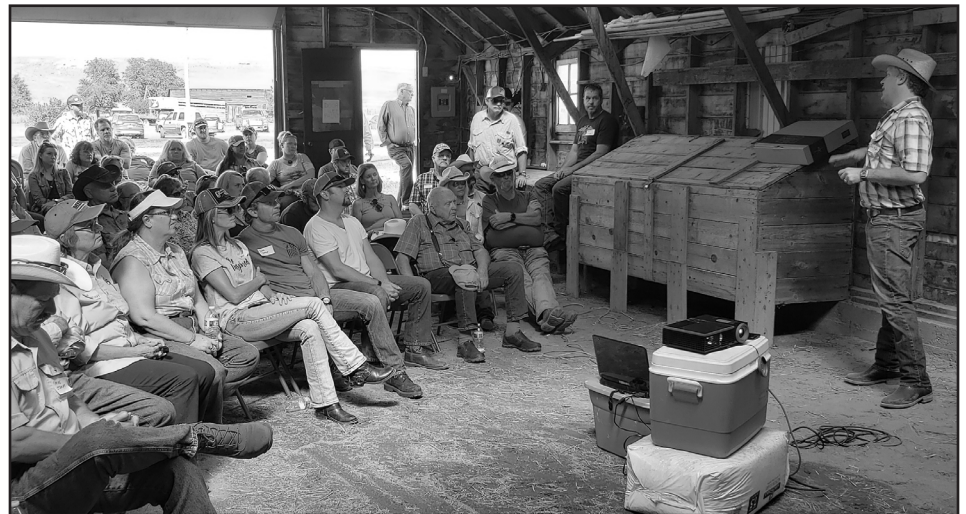
### 2020 Events

The board is making a concerted effort to hold the spring conference on the first weekend in March every year, but it ultimately depends on the location, hotel availability and partner events. We will confirm the March

conference date once the location has been solidified.

2020 marks a very special summer event for RMBA; we will be co-hosting the NBA's Summer Conference here in the Rocky Mountain Region. Please stay tuned to your email and social media for more information on this event. With the additional work that comes with co-hosting this event, **RMBA does not plan to coordinate a 2020 fall ranch tour. We hope to see you this summer instead.**

On behalf of the board, I would like to thank everyone who attended one or both of our events this year and we hope to see you for our 2020 Spring Conference.



**Top:** Bob Dineen speaks to RMBA members at the Brush facility. **Bottom:** Jim Matheson speaks to tour attendees in the Forepaugh's barn at Monkey Ranch.



# EVENTS YOU WON'T WANT TO MISS

## 2020 NBA Winter Conference

January 22-25, 2020

Renaissance Denver Stapleton  
3801 Quebec St., Denver, CO

### Daily Highlights

**Wednesday:** Welcome & Keynote

**Thursday:** Educational Presentations

**Friday:** NBA Membership Meeting & Elections

**Saturday:** Gold Trophy Show & Sale

Info & registration: [bisoncentral.com/winter-conference](http://bisoncentral.com/winter-conference).



## 2020 RMBA Spring Conference

Tentatively scheduled for the weekend of March 6/7/8, 2020  
*Location TBA*

RMBA's Spring Conference includes industry-specific, timely, expert presentations, annual membership meeting, annual elections & fun times with friends.

**RMBA welcomes presentation suggestions & sponsors. If interested, contact Jen Graves at [jennifer.nmn.gray@gmail.com](mailto:jennifer.nmn.gray@gmail.com).**

## 2020 NBA Summer Conference

*Co-hosted by RMBA*

Tentatively scheduled for June 21-24, 2020  
Little America in Cheyenne, WY

NBA & RMBA are already planning the 2020 NBA Summer Conference, which will feature two ranch tours, great speakers, a chance to network with hundreds of other producers and family-friendly bison meals and activities. Confirmed dates & location(s) will be announced in 2020.

## Welcome New Members in 2019

- Donnis Bagget & Beverly Brown
- Tait Berlier
- Nic & Samara Campbell
- Derrick & Molly Cape
- Sam Diswood
- Corey & Allison Godwin
- Kyle Hendrix
- Doug & Nicole Hoover
- Allan Jackson
- Tess Leach
- Dave Marshall
- Rocky Neely
- Blaine Oberg
- Karson Rippstein
- Christopher & Grace Seivert
- Ronda Snyder
- Michael Stanley
- Keyona Taylor
- Adam Tveten
- Brittany Van Riper
- Martin & Kelly Waage
- Jacob & Alyson Weirich

## In Fond Memory of our Dear Friend

Jacki Lee Andersen-Higgins, wife of former RMBA President Larry Higgins, went home to be with Jesus on August 14, 2019.

Jacki was born on July 11, 1954 and grew up on the family farm northeast of Genoa, Colorado with her two siblings. In the early 1980s, Jacki lost both parents and was left in charge of the family farm. On April 13, 1985 she married Larry Higgins and together they had two sons, Joshua and Josiah.

Together Jacki and Larry (and later her sister Vicki) managed the family farm and ranch. In 2000, they started raising buffalo and Jacki's love of heart-shaped rocks

formed the business name Heart Rock Bison. Jacki would not back down to hard work and loved her bucket calves, Jersey cows, hunting for heart-shaped and unusual rocks and babysitting her grandchildren.

Jacki is survived by her husband Larry of 34 years, her three sons and their families: Jeremiah and Imogene Higgins and their four sons; Joshua and Kelly Higgins and their daughter; Josiah Higgins; her sister Vicki Andersen and her brother Dick Andersen, among others.

*May You Rest in Peace*

## Jacki Andersen-Higgins

July 11, 1954 - August 14, 2019





*Held in conjunction with the National Bison Association's (NBA) Gold Trophy Show and Sale (GTSS) during the National Western Stock Show (NWSS) in Denver, Colorado.*

## *Contest Highlights*

No entry fees.

Open to those between the ages of 8 to 21 years old.

Team, individual, & junior categories.

Four classes will be judged, as determined by the Superintendent on the day of the contest. Participants can earn up to 50 points for correct placement in each class and up to 50 additional points for their Oral Reasons presentation.

Scholarships will be awarded to the top three scoring individuals (paid to the school of higher education of their choice). Additionally, recognition plaques are awarded to the top three in each category.

***Membership in the National Bison Association not required.***

Registration is simple and free. Participants not accompanied by their parents will need to bring with them a letter from their parent, FFA Advisor or 4-H Leader stating that the contestant is academically eligible (passing all classes).

Participants are encouraged to review information on Livestock Evaluation/Judging and Oral Reasons to prepare for the contest. Significant resources are available via a web search as well as contacting your local FFA or 4-H chapter (membership to these organizations is not required).

Check in at 9 a.m. at the NWSS stockyard, 1400 alleyway by the red squeeze chute. Awards will be presented around 12 noon.

***Please note the new day and time for 2020.***

*While not required for the contest, the NBA offers a Junior Membership to those 21 years old and younger. This membership enables individuals to consign bison to the NBA's GTSS under their own name.*

**Top 3  
Individuals  
Earn a  
Scholarship**

**1<sup>st</sup> - \$1500**  
Sponsored by:  
National Buffalo  
Foundation

**2<sup>nd</sup> - \$1200**  
Sponsored by:  
Rocky Mountain  
Bison Association

**3<sup>rd</sup> - \$900**  
Sponsored by:  
Rocky Mountain  
Natural Meats



For more information or to register contact:  
Jim Matheson  
jim@bisoncentral.com or 303-292-2833



NationalBison





WE KNOW A THING OR TWO, BECAUSE WE'VE SEEN A THING OR TWO

## Two Important Lessons We Learned About Bison

By **Donnis Baggett**, *Lucky B Bison*

Five-thirty in the morning is too early for your "A" game. Way too early. Especially when it comes to penning a buffalo on a moonless night.

"Don't forget to check the gates," my bride, also known as Beverly Brown, had reminded me the night before. Beverly recited that mantra often, and I wondered if she thought I was soft in the noggin.

No way would I forget to latch a gate — especially the gate to her pet bison's private quarters. Yet there I stood, staring slack-jawed at an open gate an hour and a half before daylight and wondering how not one but two chains had managed to unsnap themselves after I'd used that gate the night before.

Who could possibly be responsible? Poltergeists, perhaps? Aliens from Planet 9? The Buffalo Field Campaign? Regardless, Reaganne — a bottle-raised, 1,300-pound, 14-year-old virgin bison who preferred her private quarters over the pasture, had escaped. This was not good.

Beverly was — and still is — head-over-heels about Reaganne. I knew that Reaganne would be given a pass when the inevitable court of inquiry convened. I, on the other hand, could not expect such merciful treatment.

As a veteran observer of the human condition, I knew that my standing in our little animal kingdom ranks below that of Reaganne, the other members of our bison herd, six pampered dogs and two barn cats whose

prey of choice was Little Friskies. And of all the critters to be missing this dark morning, it had to be Reaganne.

### Getting to Know Reaganne

Reaganne was born in 1999, shortly before Beverly and I met. Her privileged life began when a sick cow died at full term with a husband-wife veterinarian team at her side. As the old cow drew her last breath the vets performed a hasty C-section and handed the little red heifer to Beverly.

She promptly named the calf Reaganne after her father, former Texas Agriculture Commissioner Reagan Brown, who had died at the ranch three weeks prior to Reaganne's dramatic arrival. The two-legged Reagan, who had a flair for making an entrance and

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entertaining a crowd, would have appreciated that.

The first four months of Reaganne's life were spent in Beverly's backyard in town to make bottle-feeding more convenient. One chilly February evening, Reaganne slipped and fell into the backyard pool. One of the dogs, a labrador retriever, decided an evening dip was a marvelous idea and jumped in to play. Beverly, who was clad in jeans, coat and barn boots, jumped in without hesitation to rescue her baby.

Reaganne's life as a city girl came to a halt when the homeowners association president called to ask if the rumors were true: Had a baby buffalo calf taken up residence in Beverly's backyard? Seems there were problems with deed restrictions and such. Who would think that bison would be persona non grata in a yard adjoining the 15th fairway?

It was time to move to the ranch. As Reaganne grew out of calf-hood and into an adult, two things became apparent: One, she didn't like buffalo. She considered them unkempt ruffians who showed a discomfiting interest in certain parts of her body that were none of their business. And two, she preferred the company of people, dogs and barn cats to that of shaggy beasts who lived in a pasture.

So it was that Reaganne's domain became the catch pen. The pen is next to the county road, so she grew up observing the comings and goings of people. Lots of people. People who stopped to see her so often that Reaganne

would walk up to the fence to give them a closer look.

### **Finding Reaganne**

And now this special buffalo named Reaganne was out of her pen. Swinging my flashlight in a semicircle to scan for glowing eyes, I heard a soft "huff" behind me. I turned and there she stood, less than 60 feet from the gate. I started to angle behind her to ease her inside, but she trotted off in the opposite direction. I could almost hear her laughing.

This wasn't the first time Reaganne had pulled a Houdini, and we knew the drill: Be patient and lure her back into the pen with goodies. Like most bison, Reaganne considered attempts to herd her a marvelous game. Going into the pen needed to be her idea.

That would take time that we didn't have. Reaganne would have to be hungry, thirsty or both to willingly go to her room. And we needed to drive to DFW Airport — three and a half hours away — to pick up NBA Assistant Director Jim Matheson for a Texas Bison Association conference. So we closed Reaganne's gate to deny access to food and water, I fired up the truck and we headed north.

It was a long three and a half hours. I will spare you the details of my trial and the sentencing phase, but suffice it to say that the prosecution was brutal, the defense was less than stellar, and I have never been happier to see Jim Matheson.

### **Reaganne's Mischief**

We returned that afternoon to find Reaganne with a strange expression on her face. Hunger, we figured. I poured some fresh range cubes into the trough and

Beverly's little darling walked calmly into her pen.

As we parked the pickup beside a Toyota that my employer provided for my business trips around Texas, I noticed a helter-skelter collection of four-inch-wide scratches on the hood. Looking closely, it became apparent that the scratches were hoof marks. Bison hoof marks. Glancing over at Beverly's car, we saw similar frenzied scratches... and a hoof-shaped hole smashed into the lower edge of the windshield.

The evidence showed that Reaganne had stood on the ground in front of each vehicle, reared up on her hind legs and attempted to mount it...exactly the way a bison cow will do when hinting that she wants to party.

A close inspection of my pickup revealed some horn rubs on the back quarter panels. That indicated that the damage had been inflicted the night before. Reaganne apparently thought the taller vehicle was a big boy she wanted to get to know better. It was a case of "if you can't be with the one you love, honey, love the one you're with."

### **What did we learn from the experience? Two things.**

**Lesson 1:** It's smart to buy your auto insurance from a carrier who knows a thing or two about animal behavior. Much to our relief, the Texas Farm Bureau had handled claims similar to ours before.

**And Lesson 2:** Don't forget to check the gates.



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